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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DAKAR 002115

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STATE FOR INR/I, DRL/AE, G/TIP, AF/RSA AND AF/W

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [CV](#) [SP](#) [SG](#)  
SUBJECT: ILLEGAL MIGRATION FROM SENEGAL: THE "TITANIC"  
DISAPPEARS BUT MORE AND LARGER BOATS CARRYING WEST AFRICANS  
REACH SPAIN'S SHORES (C-TN6-01135)

REF: A. STATE 127504

[1](#)B. DAKAR 01588

[1](#)C. DAKAR 01516

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) The supposedly U.S.-bound "Titanic" and its alleged twin (Ref B) have disappeared. According to the "Titanic's" builder, it was financed by a Lebanese businessman, (living near Soumbédioune Market (a large artisanal and fish market)) in Dakar, while a Spanish national had commissioned ten smaller pirogues from him. According to the builder and to media reports, the police were aware that the "Titanic" and other boats were being made to order specifically for the journey to the U.S. or the Canary Islands. After the burst of police activity following initial widespread media coverage of the "boat people," the police stopped making inquiries of boat builders and made significantly fewer arrests of those organizing and attempting the voyage. Meanwhile, Senegalese have become bolder -- now often leaving in the middle of the day and, by some reports, bribing the police and authorities to look the other way. Spain is feeling the strain and has reached an agreement to start conducting joint patrols with Senegal, but there is still no end in sight. END SUMMARY.

#### THE "TITANIC" IS GONE

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[1](#)2. (C) A surprise visit to the site in Rufisque where the "Titanic" was previously reported to have been in the midst of construction revealed the boat is now gone. The head builder at the site unhesitatingly told us the "Titanic," a 24-meter pirogue (fishing boat) was financed by a Lebanese person living or operating near Soumbédioune Fish Market in Dakar. The boat was built for 8-10 million CFA francs (CFAF) (USD 16-20 thousand). According to the builder, it is one of the strongest pirogues built to date and could "easily" make it to the United States. Nevertheless, after local media reports brought unwanted attention, the financier sold it. The buyer in turn resold the boat to yet another person, who, according to the builder, moved it to one of the nearby towns of Thiaroye or Yarah to remove it from the public eye. We visited both places in search of the boat, as well as nearby Bargny in search of the "Titanic's" alleged twin, but could find either.

[1](#)3. (C) The builder revealed that a Spanish national paid for construction of ten smaller pirogues, saying he "wanted to help out the fishermen." Many of those pirogues were still at the site. The builder said police were aware of construction of these boats and the "Titanic" but did not ask

about or attempt to stop construction. He said police are often paid off by those organizing trips to the Canary Islands, and that police have taken the initiative to ask for bribes. He cited a recent incident in which police stopped a pirogue with 17 men departing from a location just up the beach around 3:30 PM one afternoon. The police asked for money to let the pirogue go, but the passengers refused and were subsequently arrested.

¶4. (C) Although the "Titanic" and its twin have apparently disappeared, large pirogues approaching "Titanic's" size were visible. One boat on the builder's lot measured 21 meters by 4 meters. There were 20 or so others parked along the area's coastlines. A young man who had previously attempted the trip to the Canary Islands told us the pirogue he was on with 91 other people was longer than 21 meters.

#### A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE SECURITY FORCES

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¶5. (C) In a visit to the Police Commissariat of Rufisque, the Commissioner said he had data on the illegal migration phenomenon but would not be able to share it with us or talk about such a "sensitive" subject without direct authorization from the Interior Ministry. He did confirm that the "Titanic" had left but said the Commissariat's "zone" (referring to the Rufisque area) was under surveillance. Interestingly, while waiting to see the Commissioner, we witnessed one visitor slip a bribe to an officer to help the visitor obtain a document for his daughter's visa to an unspecified country. Within ten minutes, a second person entered the waiting area and also offered a bribe, but the officer looked at us, then waved the individual away.

¶6. (C) We got a different perspective from a visit to the Rufisque Gendarme Station. Upon entering the station, we saw

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gendarmes interrogating someone accused of organizing trips to the Canary Islands. One officer told us they were going to use the organizer to try to catch whoever was ultimately running the operations. The officer said gendarmes were working with police to do everything possible to stop young people from leaving. The gendarmes know people are buying boats in Rufisque for the voyage but believe they are not going to try to reach U.S. shores. Everyone is aware U.S. immigration laws are too stringent. Moreover, according to him, Europeans are "complicit." Noting a labor shortage in Spain and Portugal, he told us he had heard reports that when Senegalese make it to the Canary Islands, trucks almost immediately arrive to take them to work on farms.

¶7. (C) Despite attempts to stop pirogues from leaving, the gendarme said there is no solution to the problem. For one thing, security forces get no cooperation from local people. "Life here is difficult," he added. "Life in Europe is better. There is no work here." Pointing to some street vendors just in front of the station, he described their life as working all day and night to earn no more than 1,000 CFAF (USD 2) each day. He said maybe the young should leave. If given the chance, he, himself, would leave. He said his boss wants to go, too.

#### LOOKING FOR AN ESCAPE, FOR FISH, FOR OPPORTUNITY

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¶8. (C) The gendarme's view is bolstered by talking with young people who either tried to make the trip and failed or still have hopes of going. Amadou Diallo, a 29-year old street vendor, told us he decided to leave because conditions are tough. He was on a pirogue with nearly 100 other passengers that departed from Thiaroye (near Rufisque), until the pirogue developed a fuel problem and began to drift. They drifted for 16 days. Eleven people died, mainly due to cold and lack of food. Some on board were so afraid they jumped overboard and disappeared. He saved his earnings for one year to be able to pay the 400,000 CFAF (USD 800) fee for the trip. In spite of the incredibly difficult conditions of

the crossing, he said he would do so again if he got more money.

¶9. (C) Diallo and other veterans of the Canary Island trip are beginning to open up and reveal an additional reason why they wanted to go. Within the Senegalese family unit and society, children are viewed alternatively as a drain on or source of money. A local psychologist told us this is reflected in the large numbers of child beggars on the streets of Dakar, who are offered up by impoverished parents to Koranic teachers who may exploit them for begging. Diallo and others told us they were, in part, seeking to escape pressures put on them by their families, who constantly ask for money.

¶10. (C) Ali Maron, one of the "boat people" repatriated from the Canary Islands, said there is also the problem that young people have nothing to do and no way to make a living wage. He, too, asserted he would try the trip again and confided a few passengers from his boat were planning to leave the night we spoke with him. He said some people in Morocco and Mauritania were helping to organize the trips, and some are planning to attempt the crossing to the U.S. in spite of worries about turbulent seas.

¶11. (C) It is not difficult to find someone who has experienced the illicit trip to Spain. People are now nonchalant about it. The first person we met on the fishing wharf of Rufisque told us he was captain of the pirogue made infamous by media reports of cannibalism on board (Ref A). He confirmed that people began to eat the deceased. He also said you could hear "babies crying" at night. This drove four people crazy. Four others jumped overboard. Unlike most of the other young men we spoke with, he said he would not make the trip again. However, he talked about the major problems fishermen face now. Not only are there fewer fish, there are fewer men to catch the fish. Fishing vessels now have only half the men needed, because the rest have fled to Spain via the Canaries for the most part.

#### LYING FOR THE MONEY AND STEALING FOR THE JOURNEY

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¶12. (U) The potential profits from organizing these trips interact crudely with the desperation exhibited by those wanting to go on them. There are a growing number of stories of would-be migrants put on boats in southern areas of Senegal and brought to scenic Saint Louis, where they are let off and told they are in Europe.

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¶13. (U) On August 21, four young men in the Casamance, the region from which a growing number of migrants are departing, were arrested after robbing some businesses of 12 million CFAF (USD 24,000) and then using the money to pay the costs of the voyage to Spain. Local media also noted a rash of cattle thefts in the Casamance throughout the month of August and speculated it may be linked to the recent rise in illicit departures from the region.

#### SPAIN QUICKLY REACTS TO FLOOD OF NEW ARRIVALS

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¶14. (SBU) One month after a major international conference in Rabat to try to jointly fight illegal migration, local media report, a flood of new arrivals jolted the Canary Islands. By August 17, almost 3,000 immigrants came. Between August 18 and 20, 1,151 illegal migrants reached the Islands. This pushed the number of arrivals since the beginning of the year past 18,000, far exceeding the total for 2005. Those reaching the Islands over that weekend came in what one local paper described as "sophisticated" boats measuring 30 meters long. Authorities reported finding GPS devices on board, giving a location where passengers are transferred from small pirogues to larger vessels and where they are given fuel, food and water. The large number of new arrivals in significantly larger vessels inspired Spain to

send its Interior Minister to meet with Senegalese officials in August.

¶15. (C) Spanish Embassy representatives told us Spain hoped to apply the model agreement it had in place with Mauritania, but they describe coordination with GOS authorities as "frustrating." To begin with, there is confusion over the two levels of assistance being offered to Senegal. The EU has provided use of two airplanes and a boat (to be operated by EU nationals) via its Frontex program, which will last nine weeks (though with the possibility of extension). Separately, Spain has provided a helicopter and smaller equipment, such as bicycles, beach-combers, and night-vision goggles, which the GOS demanded as a condition to accepting the Frontex material. Spain also plans to provide three additional patrol boats. In return, Senegal agreed to conduct joint patrols of the open waters, which should begin within the next two weeks. They are still not sure how these patrols will work or what they will do with any boats intercepted on the way out of Senegalese waters. The Spanish Embassy also brought up the additional problem of repatriations, as they have not yet succeeded in reaching a repatriation agreement with the Senegalese.

¶16. (C) Spanish diplomats admit they know that Spain cannot stop all migrants, and say they are just looking for a way to control the phenomenon and also to ensure that migration (legal or otherwise) occurs in humane conditions. They are increasingly concerned about the growing numbers of people leaving from neighboring countries, such as The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. They believe those boats leaving from Senegal are largely "improvised." They fear, however, that Senegal's neighbors carry the potential for widespread criminal organization of such trips.

¶17. (C) Our Spanish Embassy interlocutors expressed hope for the coming weeks but noted the GOS has offered no viable solution to its own domestic problems. Although Spain has offered to contribute 100 billion CFAF (USD 200 million) to President Wade's "Return to Agriculture" (REVA) Project, meant to encourage young people to take up agriculture rather than the trip to Europe, Spanish Embassy representatives know Senegalese youth view REVA as a joke. The Spanish were surprised when a Spanish company came two weeks ago to offer to set up a bio-diesel fuel facility, guaranteed to create 50,000 jobs, but was rejected. The GOS told the company Senegal was "tired of being exploited" and "treated like a slave." The contract went to Mozambique, instead. Furthermore, Spain and Senegal had a joint project in place to install refrigerated storage units for fish, something many fishermen say is sorely needed. The project has been on hold for one and one-half years because the GOS has not yet arranged electricity for the site of the units.

#### COMMENT

¶18. (C) There is a general and powerful sentiment among the poorest Senegalese that their future is hopeless and they are powerless to change that. Former "boat people," factory workers, and even some government workers say they no longer believe in Senegal. Even those who refuse to make such a sweeping statement tell us the GOS response to this crisis is ineffective. Many view illegal migration as "win-win"

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situation for both those risking the perilous voyage and the GOS. It gives those on the boats a sense of hope and control over their destiny, while also serving as a way for the GOS to shed the country of thousands of unsatisfied people to whom it can give no work. In a politically precarious time, the GOS probably sees this as an ideal solution. If neither the Senegalese nor the Government are interested in stopping the "boat people," Spain's optimism for the coming weeks may quickly dissipate. END COMMENT.  
JACOBS